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THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: NOT ONE REVIEW BUT TWO – AND GOOD NEWS FOR THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

Robin Alexander

Director of the Cambridge Primary Review

First there was Rose – which, according to Mick Waters (QCDA's ex-head of curriculum and partner in the Rose enterprise) was Labour's pre-emptive strike against the inconvenient truths emerging from the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR).¹ Then along came Michael Gove, and both Rose and the QCDA were shown the door. Now, after months of speculation, the next chapter in the long-running national curriculum saga has opened: a new national curriculum review, this time covering both primary and secondary, was launched on 20 January 2011.

In the sharpest possible contrast to Labour's attempt to exclude the CPR from the curriculum debate we are pleased to note that two of the four members of the Expert Panel for the new national curriculum review – Mary James and Andrew Pollard - are also members of the CPR, having served on the CPR implementation team and produced one of the CPR's interim reports. However, we don't seek or expect favours. All we ask for is a fair and serious hearing for the wealth of evidence which the CPR has assembled about the strengths and weaknesses of the existing primary curriculum, and a willingness to engage with CPR's proposals for reform. We also want to ensure that DfE heeds the experience of the fast-growing body of primary teachers who have joined the CPR network, and we shall work hard to ensure this.

Attracting somewhat less publicity is the Secretary of State's positive response to the recommendation in the CPR's final report that there should be a parallel review of primary schools' capacity to teach the whole curriculum to which children are statutorily entitled – not just the core subjects – to the highest possible standard. For us this was a key recommendation, because the reality of 'entitlement' can be so dispiriting: a two-tier curriculum which too often attends to 'the basics' and leaves the rest to chance; assessment procedures which signal that only literacy and numeracy matter and indeed often squeeze the rest beyond the point of no return; and arrangements for initial teacher training, CPD and inspection which aggravate the problem by not attending to the full range of expertise which teaching a modern curriculum requires.

The CPR's view of entitlement is straightforward and, surely, logical: if children are entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum, which educationally and in law they are, then every aspect of that curriculum should be taught to the highest possible standard, regardless of how much or little time is allocated to it. It follows that 'standards' should be redefined as the quality of teaching and learning across the board. Fundamental though literacy and numeracy are, it is no longer acceptable to treat KS2 test scores in English and mathematics as proxies for the standard of children's primary education as a whole. Entitlement as we define it has implications not only for curriculum but also for assessment, pedagogy and the way expertise for primary teaching is defined and acquired.

We followed up the CPR final report by meeting ministers and officials to discuss all this. **We are delighted to report that Michael Gove has agreed to set up the additional review that the CPR report recommended, covering schools' curriculum capacity and how well it is supported by initial training, CPD, inspection and school leadership. He has also accepted our arguments about entitlement, breadth and standards. The review will be undertaken internally at DfE and the CPR will be closely involved. Watch this space.**

¹

Quoted in Bangs, J., MacBeath, J. and Galton, M. (2010) *Reinventing Schools, Reforming Teaching*, Routledge, pp 157-9,

Even though the CPR's curriculum framework has been enthusiastically welcomed in many quarters, it's not the last word. We offered it for discussion, not unquestioning adoption. But the framework has the merit of being grounded in extensive evidence from research and practice, international as well as national, and in lessons learned from past reform efforts; and unlike many curriculum specifications it starts from first principles. It asks what primary education is for, what aims it should pursue, what children most need from their primary schooling in order to lead fulfilling and productive lives, and what kind of a world we want them to inherit. Many schools, local authorities and independent organisations have welcomed what the CPR said about the curriculum and the aims and values which should drive it. Many are now using the CPR framework as a basis for reviewing what they currently provide. Why don't you join them? The network and its nine regional centres provide an ideal forum for the curriculum partnership and local responsiveness which the CPR has commended and which the government has now said must replace curriculum imposition from the centre.

- Read what the CPR says about the primary curriculum:
http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/themes/aims_and_values_in_primary_education.php
http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/themes/the_primary_curriculum.php
- Find out more about the government's review of the National Curriculum launched on 20 January 2011:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/b0073043/remit-for-review-of-the-national-curriculum-in-england/>
- Read the CPR's evidence to Lord Bew's review of KS2 testing and accountability
(link to follow)
- Find out more about the CPR network:
http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/network/about_the_network.php
- Read the CPR's final report:
<http://www.routledge.com/9780415548717>